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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT OF SPAIN 000530

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/28/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [TD](#)
SUBJECT: PANDAY GRANTED BAIL; DOOKERAN TAKES A BACK BENCH;
SPECULATION ON THE UNC'S NEXT MOVES

REF: PORT OF SPAIN 00521 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Ambassador Roy L. Austin for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Justice Anthony Carmona of the Port of Spain 6th Criminal Court granted bail to former Leader of the Opposition Basdeo Panday on April 28. Panday spent four nights in the Golden Grove Maximum Security detention center while his bail application worked its way through the system. Carmona granted bail based on Panday's medical condition and "appalling lack of medical facilities" in the prison to treat his ailments, including cardiac conditions.

¶2. (U) Across the street, in the Parliament building, United National Congress (UNC) Political Leader Winston Dookeran took a seat on the back bench. Marginalized Chief Whip Ganga Singh joined him there for the first time. Prior to the start of the session, Dookeran read a statement in which he announced that his patience is running out and that a cabal is controlling the day-to-day workings of the UNC to its, and the country's, detriment. He also stated that this weekend he will go directly to the UNC's membership to outline his "perspectives on the prospects of the UNC" and his "options for mounting a viable mission for rescuing Trinidad and Tobago from politics that remain stuck in another time."

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Even though Panday is no longer incarcerated, he is still not permitted to function as a Member of Parliament as his conviction carries a two-year sentence. This will simply make it easier for Panday to make public appearances and to call the shots in the opposition UNC as it deals with thorny leadership issues. One of the first issues will likely be an emergency UNC executive meeting to replace Dookeran as Political Leader. This is an important move since the Political Leader has final say over the party's candidates for parliamentary seats. We will be surprised if Dookeran is still in his position on Monday. It is unclear who will take the Political Leader slot once Dookeran is forced out of it.

¶4. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Second, we suspect that Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj's application to rejoin the party will be granted. If it is granted, there is a chance that Panday will step down from his seat as MP from Couva North. The Speaker of the House can grant deferral of up to 150 days in 30-day increments, pending the outcome of the appeals process, before the seat of a convicted parliamentarian must be vacated. Still, there is a chance that Panday will step down even before his appeal is heard, paving the way for Maharaj to contest the seat in a by-election. In a by-election, Maharaj is likely to win easily as Couva is a UNC stronghold and it would be clear that he was Panday's anointed successor. Once in the lower House of Representatives, Maharaj could possibly become Leader of the Opposition, provided he can garner the support of a majority

of the MPs who do not support the government. This would be a risky move for the UNC, which has faced internal leadership squabbles since the beginning of the year, and, rather than unite the party, force the factions farther apart. Clearly, the UNC is now officially split as of the moment Dookeran decided to go to the membership, although he let the cabal do the dirty work of ousting him. END COMMENT.
AUSTIN